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The President's Daily Brief

22 December 1969

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~~*Top Secret*~~

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In South Vietnam, an apparent government attempt to force the ouster of three deputies from the Lower House through demonstrations may well backfire. *(Page 1)*

There has been little change in the military situation in Laos, but casualties continue to mount on both sides. *(Page 2)*

Pravda's editorial on the 90th anniversary of Stalin's birth contains criticism of the dead dictator that could also be taken to reflect on some of Moscow's current leaders. *(Page 3)*

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SOUTH VIETNAM

A number of deputies claim to see the hand of the government in two demonstrations over the weekend calling for the expulsion from the Lower House of three members accused of pro-Communist activities. In the first and more serious incident, about 1,000 demonstrators marched on the Lower House Saturday. Some 100 of them broke into the chamber while an interpellation of the finance minister was in progress. They interrupted the session with anti-Communist and antineutralist harangues, and caused some property damage.

Yesterday, some 3,000 northern Catholic refugees from nearby villages marched through Bien Hoa city just north of Saigon demanding the removal of the three deputies.

There is indeed evidence that the deputies' charges may be well founded. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] *Thieu has encouraged certain civil servants, politicians, and military officers to promote such activities.* 50X1 *Press reports indicate some of the participants in the march on the Lower House were paid and that the few police on hand made only half-hearted attempts to interfere.*

Whatever the case, the incidents are almost certain to rekindle Lower House resentment toward the executive and complicate Thieu's efforts to smooth working relations between the two branches of government.

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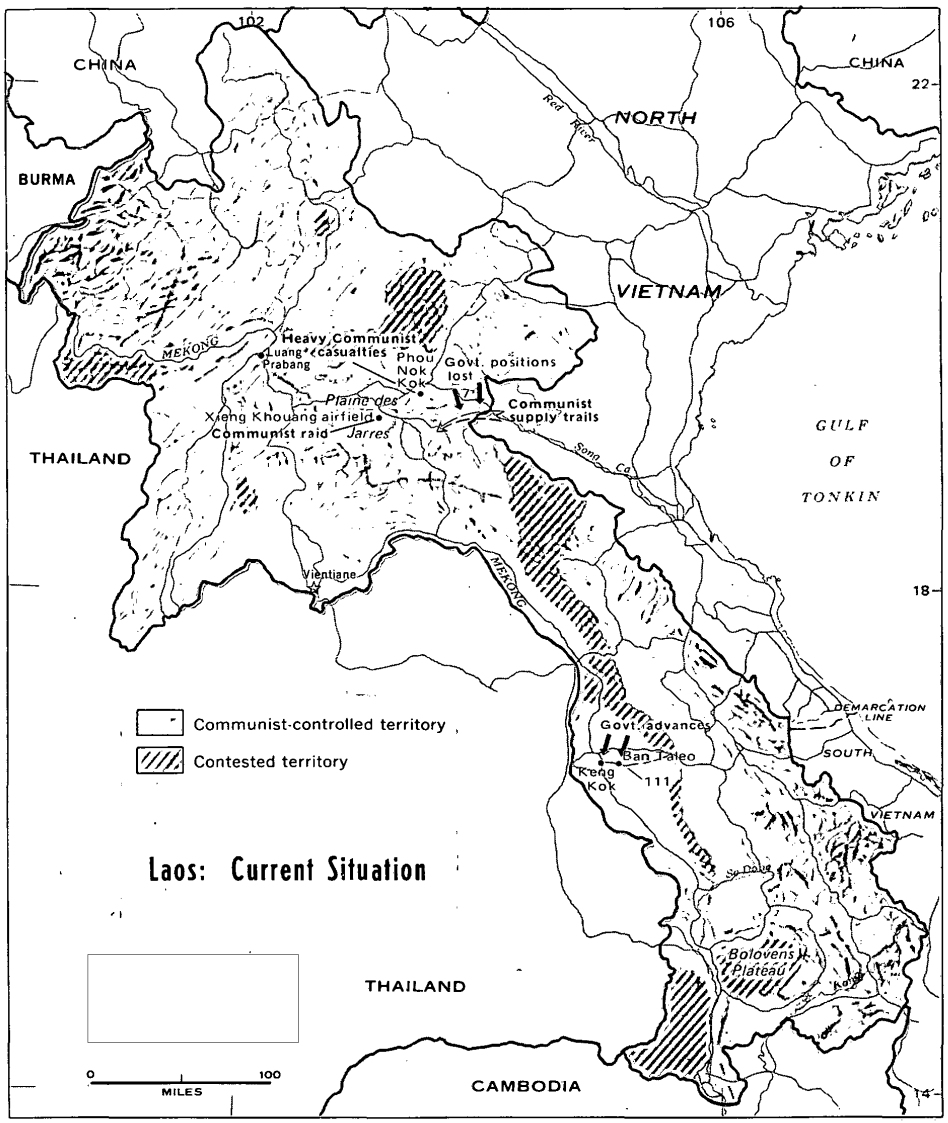

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LAOS

North Vietnamese commandos struck Xieng Khouang airfield, an important government support base on the Plaine des Jarres, on 18 December. Defenders held off the attackers, but paid a high price--43 killed.

In eastern Xieng Khouang Province, Communist troops have pushed government guerrillas out of a number of positions astride an important network of supply trails. They have had less success trying to clear government troops from the Route 7 area northeast of the Plaine, losing more than 40 troops on 19 December.

Most of this activity stems from Communist efforts to secure their supply lines, which have been under steady aerial and ground harassment since early September. The importance they attach to securing the Route 7 area can be judged from the fact that more than 500 North Vietnamese troops have been killed in the past two months trying to overrun Phou Nok Kok, a highpoint overlooking Route 7.

In the south, government guerrillas have reoccupied several key positions near Route 111 in recent days.

These limited gains should ease the pressure farther west where less aggressive government units have been attempting to thwart a Communist threat to Ban Taleo and Keng Kok.

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USSR

Pravda's editorial on the 90th anniversary of Stalin's birth is the first formal commemoration of the dead dictator's birthday since 1955. It notes that it was while Stalin was the Communist Party's General Secretary that the USSR's socioeconomic transformation took place and victory over Germany was achieved. It also praises Stalin for his part in the struggle against opposition elements within the party.

But the commentary then charges Stalin with theoretical and political errors "which became chronic in the last period of his life." The editorial goes on to say that errors connected with the cult of personality were harmful, quickly adding that the party has already corrected these mistakes.

Pravda's commentary is one of the most objective accounts of Stalin's role to appear in the Soviet press in several years. Criticism of Stalin's performance during his later years, by implication at least, affects many of the USSR's present rulers. They, as well as Stalin, must take some responsibility for decisions reached at that time which have had a great bearing on major unsolved problems now troubling the Soviet leadership.

It is too early to say just what the new line suggested by the editorial portends and for whom, but it will certainly be a factor in the maneuvering prior to the party congress now scheduled to be held sometime next year.

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NOTES

Libya: The Libyans want the US to begin the evacuation of Wheelus Field by 1 June 1970, and conclude the transfer within the month. Many details of the phaseout remain unsettled, but the negotiators expect to meet again on Tuesday for final talks leading to signature of an agreement before Christmas. Libyan leader Qaddafi's presence at the Arab summit meeting in Rabat, however, and the announced visit of both Nasir and Numayari of Sudan to Libya at the conclusion of the summit, may cause the Libyans to delay until these leaders are able to attend the signing ceremonies.

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South China Sea:

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